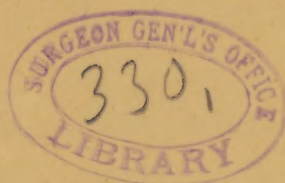


CUTTER. (Eph.)

Nervousness, Divorce, Food.

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NERVOUSNESS, DIVORCE, FOOD.

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IN a late number of the North Amer. Review, Dr. Allen showed the present prevalence of divorce, and in endeavoring to account for it raised the question in substance, whether increased nervousness might not explain the increase of divorces. While we believe that no one cause, or set of causes, alone, can account for the facts stated, still we think the physical, physiological or pathological subjective conditions expressed by the word "nervousness," or better by the word "neurosis," are worthy of the attention of those who study the ætiology of divorce. Take one hundred married couples who are *not* nervous and one hundred couples who *are* nervous. If the divorce disease attack both we think there would be no mistake in affirming that the larger number of divorces, other things being equal, would be found with the nervous couples. All know that nervous folks are harder to get along with than those who are not nervous. This is easily explained. We all receive information as to what is in the world through the medium of nerves. The eye, an instrument of precision capable of detecting over three billions of vibrations in one second of time, sees through the impressions made on the optic nerve. Blindness results when this nerve is injured. The ear, another wonderful instrument of precision, that can detect 20,000 vibrations in one second of time, hears by means of the auditory nerve. The tongue tastes with the gustatory nerve. The body feels with the nerves of touch. The nose smells by the olfactory nerves. Our innate intuitions all come through cerebral nerve centers. Respiration, circulation, secretion, digestion, development, growth, etc., are governed and maintained through the nerve centers. Is this doubted? Look in upon a family where the eldest married daughter is ill with puerperal convulsions. Her nerve centers poisoned with retained urea. Her renal excretion loaded with albumen—the life of her blood. What are the fearful objective symptoms but a terrible result of interference with nerve force?

Take an example common in New England. A woman, pale, irritable, sensitive, fretful, peevish, or, as they say, "spleeny and nervous." How distorted the evidence presented to her sensorium, to her weakened nerve centers, must be! Sometimes she may look the picture of health, yet suffers from pain and abnormal sensations, perhaps even aberration of mind—but all are realities to her—and yet how easy is it for husbands of such women to complain of their incompatibility of temper, their want of congeniality, etc., etc. The matter ripening with years may be followed by the production of alienation enough to cause separation by law! We knew a husband to seek

divorce in Boston since his wife became insane after marriage. Yet the wife was suffering from local physical disease sufficient to account for the mental alienation under her circumstances. The court refused a bill. The man ran off to California and re-married, while his deserted wife, under treatment, and his absence, disclosed no evidence of insanity.

But have nervous diseases increased? Dr. George M. Beard, the eminent neurologist of New York, in a late article in the Virginia Medical Monthly, July, 1879, says that functional nervous diseases are new and not found in our older medical works. There was not even enough new disease of the weakened type (neurasthenia) to give it a name, but now we find evidence of the increase of this class of troubles in,

1. The establishment of specialists, and special journals and literature of neurology.

2. The testimony of physicians over forty years in practice, that more cases of disease are connected with the nervous system now than when they entered on the practice of medicine.

3. The number of insane persons is on the increase, and their treatment less successful as seen by the increase of hospitals and the perusal of their reports. (In 1871 I found, in the State Insane Asylum at Stockton, Cal., 1,000 patients. That is one to 500 of the State population.)

4. The term "nervous prostration" is in common usage.

5. The shelves of the druggists show more official and nonofficial drugs for nervousness than ever before.

6. Nervine hospitals.

7. Sthenic disease replaced by asthenic.

8. Great national mental activity. We are a nation of readers. Our ephemeral literature is immense.

9. Look over the faces of a New England audience. See the cry of nerve distress depicted on the adult faces.

10. Culture in modern civilization means increased exercise of nerve force.

11. Charcot, in Paris in 1875, published a case of hysteria followed by central spinal lesion. Now hysteria is one of the many reflex nervous disturbances arising from peripheral uterine lesion. If Charcot is correct we have certainly come on a great idea in neurology—one that has a tremendous influence in unsettling the nervous systems of our women, and which goes far to explain the irreconcilable differences in unhappy married life. Who can expect an agreeable good nature in a person whose posterior columns of the spinal cord are in a state of fatty degeneration

(sclerosis)? Gynæcological diseases are very prevalent.

Perhaps, then, divorce is a matter of medical jurisprudence; certainly I have known such cases. If these things are so, are there any causes of large operation, that are calculated to unsettle the nervous system? We reply "yes," but we will only allude to one that operates three times a day on every person, almost, in society. Dr. James H. Salisbury, of Cleveland, Ohio, refers to it in the remark, "Food is an agent of tremendous power." Feed mankind with the same science that birds, kine, and horses are fed—to wit, on their natural food—and then we may look for the healthy results obtained with these animals. Dairy-men know how to feed for health and milk. Hostlers know how to feed their horses, and ladies their canaries. They all seek to give the normal natural food of the animal under their care. Now if man would treat his own race as he treats his animals, we think human nervous systems would not show such signs of weakness. What is nerve food? It is a selection of aliments containing all the elements necessary for the nerves in normal proportions and in assimilable conditions. Phosphorus, sulphur, fats, etc., are regarded as chemical nerve food.

We ask, "are there any aliments in universal civilized use that do not contain the normal amount of food for the nervous system?" We reply "yes,"—flour, starch, sugar. Liebig long ago pointed out that two-thirds of the mineral elements—including the gluten and phosphate cells—were removed by milling. He predicted disaster to the human race for demanding an article of flour that should make up into *white* bread—the dark colored bread being due to the retention of the gluten cells in their normal proportions. Magendie fed dogs on flour. They all died in forty days. He fed others on wheat and they thrived, etc., etc. Now flour is largely made up of the parenchymatous starch of the wheat. In being made white it loses three-fourths of the peripheral mineral elements that our Creator intended man should get when wheat was eaten. In other words three-fourths of the nerve food is withdrawn from the most prominent article of diet used by married couples who seek divorce. We do not wish to diatribe, but we would respectfully say to Dr. Allen that if he could induce the married to give themselves the phosphorus and the nerve food intended for wheat eaters, that their nerve centers would be better nourished and fed. In this case they would perform their life duties better and be less sensitive to outside influences. As a hungry man is more impressible, (may we call it nervous? look for example at a hungry company waiting for a delayed dinner) than man well fed, so nerve fed couples could bear with and put up with the disagreeabilities of life. Their temper would be better, as their health would be better. Reproduction would be less an abnormal and more of a physiological process. The mother's nerve centers well fed and sustained, would delight in the agreeable music of the voices and feet of children. We would have more Cornelias. The function of lactation would be well performed, the children have a better start in the world, and life be much less a burden to the attendants. As the dairy-

men feed for milk, so may physicians feed. For example, a few years ago a Boston lady married and went to Maine to live. Her age was 28 years, and her weight ninety-eight pounds. After a time she was delivered of twin sons. A strong desire was expressed to have the function of lactation, so that their support should be derived from the mother alone. She was placed on the dairyman's plan and carried it out. After six months—the twins had lived on their mother alone—one weighed seventeen pounds and the other eighteen pounds, while the mother had gained ten pounds in weight. There are no signs of divorce in this family, and the twins are perpetual sources of delight to all around. In my opinion starving nerve centers means, deficient secretion, disaster, and sometimes divorce. In this connection it may be proper to ask are there any neuroses which would especially interfere with the marital state and cause unhappiness? Physicians well know the result of reflex irritation. Among them is an exaltation of the sense of touch, so that the lightest contact produces excessive pain. For example, I have seen the slightest touch of a patient's chest produce agony. Another where a gentle touch of the finger on a dorsal spine caused the patient to faint, unconscious. This state of things is called hyperæsthesia (over feeling). When hyperæsthesia becomes located in the way of marital life the history of the pair becomes extremely unhappy. For example, some fifteen years ago a divorce was decreed in Massachusetts on the ground of impotency due to congenital malformation and sworn to by an expert (so-called). Subsequently a true expert showed nothing present but vaginismus (hyperæsthesia) to be present. So that in this case, at least, a *neurosis* caused divorce. Now, if this wife had been treated gynæcologically, and cured, no divorce would have been decreed.

As a physician, I believe that more are generally cross, peevish, irritable, ugly, morose, unfeeling, revengeful because of hungry nerves than is usually believed to be the case. The time to approach for a favor is just after a good dinner. On the other hand intoxicated nerve centers steel the heart to murder and crime. It is not intended to wink out of sight natural depravity, but we do believe if the nervous systems of the married were well nourished, that much of the incentive to divorce would be removed.

In conclusion, we would express surprise at the ease with which divorces are obtained. At Lowell I once heard a judge give a hearing to a wife. She began her relation and had not proceeded far when she remarked, "He struck me." "Did he strike you?" interrupted the judge. "Yes," was the reply. "Divorce decreed" said the judge, and this closed the hearing. If divorces are sapping the foundation of our national life more than murders, and other crimes, ought not our legislators to make a more serious matter of it? How did Judge — know but the woman lied, and that this was her scheme to get another husband? It appeared, however, to the writer that food had much to do with the decree, for it was dinner time. The judge was human and hungry, so his nerve centers were not well settled, and made but short work with the case. We repeat "food is an agent of tremendous power."

